

THE WEDDING FEAST

– *AUGUST 23. – MATTHEW 22:1-14. –*

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" – Luke 13:34.

HERE WE have another parable of the Kingdom. Today's lesson shows that the promises of God and His providences toward Israel under the Law Covenant were all designed to fit and prepare the Israelites to be God's holy nation, and especially to provide at the coming of Christ a sufficient number to constitute the elect Church, Messiah's joint-heirs in the Kingdom – His Bride. The parable shows that only a few were "Israelites indeed," in whom was no guile – not enough to constitute the Kingdom class; hence the call of this Gospel Age, selecting from the Gentiles a sufficient number of saintly characters to be joint-heirs with the Jewish remnant in the Messianic Kingdom.

The Kingdom of Heaven, otherwise styled the Kingdom of God, is not to be an earthly Kingdom, but a Heavenly one, whose Ruler, the glorified Christ, will not be an earthly king, but a Heavenly Being of the highest rank – of the Divine nature. This Kingdom, representing God and the Heavenly rule, or dominion, is to be established amongst men for the eradication of sin. Its first work will be the binding of Satan, the "Prince of this world." Afterward all the works of darkness will be overthrown. The overthrow will at first cause a great Time of Trouble, following which, as the Reign of Righteousness progresses, the curse in its every form will give way before the blessings of Messiah's Kingdom – until there shall be no more curse, no more sighing, no more crying, no more dying.

But before this Heavenly Kingdom can be established, it is a part of the Divine decree and arrangement that there shall be a Bride class selected from amongst men. These are begotten of the Holy Spirit and are God's workmanship, in whom He works by the exceeding great and precious promises of the Scriptures and by the providences of life. Thus they are being transformed in mind and made ready for the glorious birth-resurrection by which they will be "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," from earthly nature to Heavenly nature. Thus they will enter into the joys of their Lord by becoming His Bride class, His joint-heirs in His Kingdom.

APPLICATION OF THE PARABLE

For the development of this Kingdom class the world has now been waiting since the days of Jesus, when by His death He opened up a new Way of Life and became the Advocate before the Father for all those desirous of being His disciples, His joint-heirs, His Bride.

Today's lesson takes up the Kingdom project at the time of our Lord's earthly ministry. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power [liberty or privilege] to become sons of God." – John 1:12.

Jehovah Himself is the King who made a marriage for His Son – arranging before the foundation of the world that there should be certain joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom. This marriage, of course, could not take place until the King's Son had come into the world and had made the way for His followers and for the Kingdom of which He is to be King.

At the appropriate time God sent His servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; but they would not come. John the Baptist and his disciples did this work of calling to the attention of the Jewish people the fact that the King's Son was in their midst. He said, "There standeth One among you whom ye know not." (John

1:26.) Again he said, "He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom; but the friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth Him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice; this my joy therefore is fulfilled." (John 3:29.) John rejoiced to hear the voice of the Bridegroom. Prophetically he foretold that the calling of the Bride class had come, although he himself could not be a member of it.

MADE LIGHT OF THE MESSAGE

Again other servants were sent forth. Jesus sent His disciples to the Jews, saying, "Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have prepared My dinner; My oxen and My fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come unto the marriage" feast.

But was the Message of Jesus and His disciples received? Nay! The people, under the guidance of the Scribes and the Pharisees, the theologians of that time, made light of the Message and went their way – one to his farm, another to his merchandise, saying, We do not believe this Message respecting the Kingdom. Some did even worse than this. They entreated these servants shamefully, spitefully, and slew them. Not only was Jesus slain by the unbelieving ones who had been invited to the feast, but His faithful disciples also were evilly treated and slain.

Then, as seen in another parable, Jehovah was wroth with that people Israel, and sent forth His armies, destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. The fact that it was the Roman army under Titus which destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70 did not make it any less the army of Jehovah, for He is able to make the wrath **[R5510 : page 234]** of man praise Him and able to use whom He may please as His messengers, or servants.

GENTILES CALLED TO THE WEDDING

Meantime God said to His servants, the Apostles, and to others through them, The wedding is provided, but the Jewish nation, which was especially invited, have not been found worthy of the honor. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. So those servants went into the highways and gathered together as many as they found, and brought them in. Thus the wedding was provided with guests.

Highways represent public concourse, the world over. The Lord's ambassadors were no longer to restrict themselves to Jews, but were to make known to every people, kindred and tongue, the fact that God is now calling out of the world a little company, lovers of righteousness, to be followers of the Lamb and eventually to become joint-heirs with the Redeemer in His Kingdom. Be it noted **[R5511 : page 234]** that these ambassadors were not to intercept all the people in the highways, but merely to urge upon all those whom they met in the concourse, the great privilege of the open door to the Wedding Feast.

These were not all saintly, good; some of them, on the contrary, were bad. The Apostles explain this, saying that not many great, not many rich, not many noble, but chiefly the poor, the mean things of this world, hath God chosen. The Apostles speak, along the lines of our lesson, of the class that God is selecting from the world. No matter how mean, no matter how degraded, no matter how ignoble by nature – all who are willing to receive the grace of God may be made suitable for the wedding by the covering of the wedding garment, the Righteousness of Christ.

Indeed, however noble or worthy many are naturally, they are still not fit for the presence of the King. All who attend this wedding must have on the wedding garment – must be covered with the merit of Christ's Righteousness. The wedding is thus furnished with guests – all that the King had intended – every place filled. Thus and

otherwise does the Lord indicate that the number of the Elect is a definitely fixed one; and that as soon as the special number has been found, the call will cease.

INSPECTING THE GUESTS

The custom of the Jews, arranged by Divine providence doubtless, was that at every wedding feast each guest was to put on a white wedding garment, covering his own garments. Thus all at the wedding were on an equal footing as respects dignity, because they were the guests of the host. So all who come to God's great Feast provided through Christ must come, not through any worthiness of their own in the flesh, but acknowledging that they have an insufficiency of merit to be acceptable to God, and must accept the merit of Christ as making them worthy of the honor to which they aspire in responding to this invitation.

Each guest entering the house was supplied with the robe, and was expected to put it on immediately. For any one to appear without that wedding garment would be a mark of disrespect to the host who had provided it. Indeed, for any one to appear at the wedding without the robe would imply that he had taken it off; for no one was admitted without the robe. This is the picture given us in the parable. A guest was found there who had not on the wedding garment – one, therefore, who in disregard of his host had removed his wedding garment, the wearing of which was the condition of his admission.

The words, "When the king came in," signify an inspection just prior to the feast. Since the King of the parable is Jehovah Himself, this would seem to mean that God takes note through the exhibition of Divine Justice in some manner of any one professing loyalty, yet disregarding the merit of Christ's death. Or, Christ might properly be understood to be referred to as the King in this instance; for at His coming He is to be invested with Kingly authority and power by the Heavenly Father, as our Lord Himself indicates in the parables of the Pounds and the Talents. At His Second Advent, therefore, He

tells us, He will Himself inspect all those who pose as being His faithful servants – all those who are desirous of enjoying the Wedding Festival.

The man found without a wedding garment in the presence of the king we should understand to represent a class, and not merely one individual. So we might find just such a class today, professing to be followers of Christ, professing to be waiting for the marriage of the Lamb, professing to hope to enter into the joys of their Lord, yet telling us that they are no longer trusting in the merit of Christ's Sacrifice for their standing with the Father. These have rejected Jesus as their Savior, their Redeemer, the Atoner for their sins. They merely retain Him as their Teacher, and then, apparently, accept only a part of His teachings.

These are manifestly unfit to be members of the Bride of Christ. Only the loyal, only the faithful, are to be of that class. The parable shows that all those who reject the merit of Christ's Sacrifice will be rejected from the Kingdom class. They are unable to say how they came in without a "wedding garment"; for they did not come in without it. No one was ever admitted into the fellowship of the Spirit in the Church which is the Bride of Christ without first having on the wedding garment of Christ's merit, covering his imperfection. Those admitting thus that they have taken off the wedding garment are cast out summarily. The king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

THE OUTER DARKNESS

When our minds were filled with hallucinations of the Dark Ages, we read into this and into other Scriptures what they do not contain. We assumed that the class represented by the man without the wedding garment would be cast into eternal torment, and there suffer to all eternity. But now, examining the Scriptures more carefully, we have perceived that as all of these guests at the

wedding came into the light of the wedding chamber from the darkness of the outside world, so the casting of one of them out of the light into the outer darkness would merely mean the taking from such a one the knowledge and the joys represented by the wedding-chamber light.

As for the outside world, we know that the Apostle John declares that the whole world lieth in darkness, "in the Wicked One." We know also that as soon as the Bride class shall have been completed, a great Time of Trouble will prepare the world for the blessings of Messiah's Kingdom later on. During that trouble all those who are in the darkness will have weeping and gnashing of teeth – discontent, anguish, disappointment, etc., connected with the overthrow of many of their wrongly based human hopes and expectations.

Our Lord concluded the parable with the statement, "For many are called, but few are chosen." This does not mean, as we once supposed, that only an Elect few will get any favor from God in the future, and that all the remainder of mankind will be eternally tortured. We must read it in harmony with the context. The Jewish **[R5511 : page 235]** nation was called, or invited, to the wedding – and failed, except the few "Israelites indeed." For eighteen hundred years the Message has gone out into the highways, to one nation after another of the Gentiles, until many have more or less heard the call of the Gospel Age. Yet only a few have accepted and have therefore come into the elect condition. And of those who come into this elect condition there will still be a class not properly appreciative which will be cast away, or rejected.

Again the Master drew attention to the matter, saying, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." The Little Flock, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, will through their faithfulness become God's chosen people, His elect Church, the Bride of Christ. Then, later on, they with their Lord

will be the Heavenly Father's Agency for blessing all the non-elect with the glorious opportunities of Restitution to all the earthly blessings and good things lost through Father Adam's disobedience and fall. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's Seed and heirs."

